



2016: A LOOK BACK

YEAR MARKED BY FLOODS, NOTABLE SUCCESSES

Over the past year, the TCEQ has had many challenges, but TCEQ staff have risen to the occasion time after time. The agency has made many strides in protecting the health and environment of the people of Texas.

With more than 2,700 full-time personnel working hard to protect Texans, it is not possible to mention more than a handful of the noteworthy events of 2016, but here are some that stand out.

TCEQ RESPONDS TO HISTORIC FLOODING

Major droughts are often broken by heavy floods, and Texas, which suffered from one of the worst droughts in its history from 2009-2014, was no exception. When much-needed rain started to refill reservoirs in the spring of 2015, it just kept coming. Soon the

rain turned into a series of devastating floods that continued into the summer of 2016.

During these severe floods, numerous dams in Texas engaged their emergency spillways at one time or another. To help reassure a concerned public, TCEQ Dam Safety Program engineers worked around the clock to respond to concerns about dams and to provide dam owners with technical assistance and guidance. They also informed public officials that most dams were working as designed.

TCEQ engineers investigated and tracked dams impacted by flooding to ensure appropriate safety measures were in place and that dam repairs were addressed. Read the [October 2016 Natural Outlook story about the Dam Safety Program](#).

In response to widespread flooding, the TCEQ also deployed staff around the state to help with flood response and recovery efforts. As a member of the State Emergency Management Council, the TCEQ was activated eight times to serve around the clock at the State Operations Center in Austin under the state's Incident Command System Infrastructure Branch for a total of 60 days.

During this time, the TCEQ worked with public drinking water facilities to identify issues, provide technical assistance, track boil water notices, and to ensure safe drinking water was available to all citizens impacted by flooding. The TCEQ also sent

members of its Disaster Response Strike Team into the flood-impacted areas. They conducted site visits to industrial facilities as flood waters receded to help evaluate the integrity of facilities that handle hazardous substances.

AIR POLLUTANT WATCH LIST SUCCESSES

The TCEQ had several air quality successes in 2016. Three chemicals were removed from the Air Pollutant Watch List: nickel in Dallas, which was added in 2004; propionaldehyde in Galveston, which was added in 2001; and sulfur dioxide in Beaumont, which was added in 2003.

Each year the TCEQ collects ambient air monitoring data and evaluates the potential for adverse health effects. The TCEQ's Air Pollutant Watch List program addresses areas in Texas where monitoring data show persistent, elevated concentrations of air toxics. Following a listing, the TCEQ works with existing industry and with new applicants in the watch list area to limit emissions of the identified pollutant. Once levels are reduced and data show consistent compliance, the pollutant for that area can be delisted from the APWL.

Read more about the [APWL sites and successes](#).



TCEQ Gains New Intergovernmental Relations Director

At the end of October, Ryan Vise, an adviser for Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, took over as director of Intergovernmental Relations at the TCEQ. He replaced Mark Harmon, who had been in the position since 2013.

Vise, a Leander native who graduated from Texas Tech University with a degree in political science in 2007, served as an adviser on environmental policy in the governor's office and had previously been a travel aide there, as well.



LEGISLATION

Big issues that the TCEQ has faced over the last year:

- Making sure that new federal drinking water standard rules were developed and implemented
- Adopting rules and implementing legislation: seawater desalination (HB 2031); disposal of nonhazardous brine (HB 2230); and marine seawater use (HB 4097)

The 85th Texas legislative session begins on Jan. 10, 2017. Looking toward this upcoming session, the TCEQ developed a list of legislative recommendations with a high priority on fixing budgetary issues. Facing across-the-board budget reductions of 4 percent for all

“In my previous job, you could see the great working relationship between the governor’s office and the TCEQ,” he says. “I thought the position would be a great opportunity to share my expertise in governmental relations with the agency.”

Vise—who has also served as a governmental affairs specialist for Copart, an online auto auction company—says his role in Intergovernmental Relations is to serve as a liaison between the TCEQ and elected officials.

“There are always going to be ‘hot topic’ issues that come up,” he says.

Intergovernmental Relations coordinates agency responses to legislative inquiries and manages the agency’s internal legislative analysis process. The coordination by Vise and his staff allows TCEQ experts to focus on what they need to do, and the office also serves as a resource for elected officials to get the information they need to assist their constituents.

state agencies, the TCEQ has found ways to ensure that it can continue with its core mission while striving to meet the requirements set forth by the Texas Legislature.

WATER STUDY ADDRESSES FUNDING NEEDS

The 84th Texas Legislature directed the TCEQ to conduct a study of the primary water account to address revenue shortfalls. The TCEQ assembled a cross-agency team to assess water programs in terms of each program’s workload, the revenues generated, and benefits to fee payers.

Using information from the team, the agency identified the programs that do not generate enough revenue to meet their costs. The agency’s analysis is summarized in three categories:

1. the agency’s workload compared to the revenue generated,



Ryan Vise became director of TCEQ’s Intergovernmental Relations at the beginning of November.

The 85th Texas legislative session begins on Jan. 10, 2017. Besides dealing with a tighter overall budget, Vise sees the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan and addressing budget shortfalls in the Office of Water as the big issues that the TCEQ will have to deal with during the 85th session.

2017 will also bring unknown challenges as a new president and EPA director settle into their positions, but Vise does not anticipate much changing for the TCEQ and what it does for the state. 🌟

2. programs without a dedicated fee, and
3. inequities among fee payers.

The [study](#) is available to the legislature in 2017 as it considers funding from water fees.

TCEQ TAKES ON CHEMICAL REPORTING PROGRAM

In 2015, the Texas Tier II Chemical Reporting Program was transferred from the Texas Department of State Health Services to the TCEQ under HB 942.

On March 1, 2016, the Tier II program at the TCEQ finished its first annual reporting period with 79,320 chemical reports received from the regulated community. As of Dec. 5, staff had handled 4,772 phone calls and completed audits on 78,773 —about 99 percent—of the chemical inventory reports received during this reporting period.

The Tier II program worked with facilities to correct report deficiencies for 15,275 facilities that either submitted partial or incorrect information or did not pay the correct fee. By Dec. 5, deficiencies at more than 10,000 facilities had been resolved.

Also during FY 2016, the TCEQ conducted 39 field investigations at ammonium nitrate storage facilities in the state.

HELPING COMMUNITIES PLAN

As a part of legislative implementation, the TCEQ created a grant program, which helps Local Emergency Planning Committees fulfill their responsibilities under the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act. The program began accepting applications from Texas LEPCs on July 22, 2016. The program will award up to \$4.42 million to Texas LEPCs during its first year in fiscal 2017 and up to \$210,000 annually after that.

25 YEARS OF MICKEY LELAND INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The TCEQ marked 25 years of the Mickey Leland Environmental Internship Program in 2016.

The Mickey Leland Environmental Internship Program, which places interns

at the TCEQ, other state agencies, and private companies, started in 1992 with 35 interns and in 2016 had 115.

Since its inception, the TCEQ has benefited from almost 2,000 interns who have participated in the program. The agency's human resources department considers these interns to be part of its potential hiring pool. Currently, 45 former interns are on the agency's payroll, including Ramiro Garcia Jr., deputy director, Office of Enforcement and Compliance; Jaime Garza, regional director for Laredo and Harlingen offices; and Lori Wilson,



executive assistant to the agency's executive director. Alums even include former NFL coach Daron K. Roberts. Read the [August 2016 Natural Outlook story about the Mickey Leland program](#).

TOXICOLOGIST RECOGNIZED FOR RESEARCH

In 2016, the Society of Toxicology, a distinguished international association, recognized two papers by TCEQ toxicologist Joseph "Kip" Haney as among the best of peer-reviewed risk assessment research published in 2015.

The society, which is dedicated to furthering the science of toxicology and has members in more than 60 countries, picked two of Haney's research papers on hexavalent chromium. Haney's studies, which were both published in *Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology*, outline a new method for determining a safe level of hexavalent chromium in groundwater using data from laboratory animals. The good news for Texans and the rest of the country is that Haney's work shows that the federal drinking water standard for chromium protects health.

NEW TCEQ LAB OPENS

The TCEQ also opened its new Houston-area laboratory in 2016.

After more than four years since the search to find a new laboratory started, the agency finally opened its new and nearly 15,000-square-foot laboratory in Sugar Land. The lab was designed to provide the TCEQ with analytical support for a variety of water, wastewater, and air testing needs.

The former Houston lab was more than 25 years old and was not initially designed as a laboratory. According to a study performed by an outside consultant, the old lab had additional problems that were even more pressing than age: it had a dysfunctional physical arrangement, inadequate lab infrastructure, an inefficient HVAC system with improper ventilation,



and posed significant safety hazards to lab personnel. Read the [September 2016 Natural Outlook story about the new lab](#).

PROTECTING TEXAS' NATURAL RESOURCES

The TCEQ's public awareness program, [Take Care of Texas](#), continues to encourage Texans to "do your part" to help keep the state's air and water clean, conserve water and energy, and reduce waste.

Public service announcement recordings donated in 2015 by Grammy award winner Rick Treviño and Kevin Fowler continued to garner air time across the state.

The second annual statewide *How Do You Take Care of Texas?* elementary school art contest for kindergarten through fifth grade was held. [Fifteen regional winners and one grand-prize winner](#) were selected from more than 3,991 entries—an increase of 1,355 from the previous year. All regional winners were awarded Samsung tablets. The grand-prize winner—Gabriella Almaguer,



a fourth-grader from Driscoll Elementary School in Corpus Christi—and one lucky teacher—Frank Barerra, who teaches fourth grade at Driscoll Elementary—were awarded Samsung laptops. Tablets and laptops were donated by contest partner Samsung Austin Semiconductor.

In January 2016, Take Care of Texas partnered with the Girl Scouts of Central Texas to create the first Take Care of Texas Girl Scout patch. The award shows a commitment to both learning and educating others on how they can take care of the environment. The new patch is available to Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas and Girl Scouts of Greater South Texas.

Take Care of Texas ended 2016 by developing a partnership with Waste Management of Texas Inc. This partnership is hosting the first annual Take Care of Texas Video Contest for sixth through twelfth graders. The contest began in September 2016 and students will submit unique, 30-second video public service announcements portraying positive ways Texans can do their part to protect the environment. Students in sixth through eighth grades will compete for GoPro cameras and

accessories while high school students will compete for scholarship funds provided by WMTX, who committed to a minimum two-year partnership.

ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Nine individuals and organizations were honored in 2016 by winning a [Texas Environmental Excellence Award](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/pd/020/2016/holding-back-disaster). The nine categories range from civic-community to pollution prevention to youth.

The winners were selected by a TCEQ blue-ribbon committee and the governor. The awards were presented during the final evening of the agency's Environmental Trade Fair and Conference, held every spring. Winners were recognized for developing no-till farming techniques, protecting and restoring water resources, educating the public about water resources, waste reduction, and more. Read the [May/June 2016 *Natural Outlook* about the awards](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/pd/020/2016/2016-k-5-art-contest-winners). 🌱



For More Information

Natural Outlook on Dam Safety Program
www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/pd/020/2016/holding-back-disaster

Natural Outlook on Mickey Leland Program
www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/pd/020/2016/not-just-an-internship

Natural Outlook on the TCEQ's new lab
www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/pd/020/2016/passing-the-test

Natural Outlook on the TEEA Awards
www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/pd/020/2016/2016-texas-environmental-excellence-awards

Air Pollutant Watch List Successes
www.tceq.texas.gov/toxicology/apwl/list.html

Water Study
www.tceq.texas.gov/agency/water-study

Take Care of Texas
TakeCareOfTexas.org

- Art Contest
- 2nd Annual Art Contest Winners
takecareoftexas.org/kids/kids-art-contest/2016-k-5-art-contest-winners
- Video Contest

Texas Environmental Excellence Awards
www.TEEA.org



Natural Outlook is published monthly by the TCEQ's Agency Communications Division. Articles are not copyrighted and may be reproduced. (Photos and graphics that are credited to other sources may not be used without their permission.) Please credit the TCEQ for material used and send a copy to the editor: Natural Outlook, MC 118, TCEQ, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, TX 78711-3087. Or e-mail <ac@tceq.texas.gov>, or fax 512-239-5010.

✉ To sign up to receive e-mail alerts of new issues, visit www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/outlook.

How is our customer service? www.tceq.texas.gov/customersurvey

The TCEQ is an equal opportunity employer. The agency does not allow discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

Leaves © scorpp iStock collection/Thinkstock. Sky © Serghei Velusceac Hemera collection/Thinkstock. Texas Capitol © Tashka iStock collection/Thinkstock. All other photos TCEQ.